

Life's a Beach!

The idea of conducting classes in the great outdoors rather than the classroom might sound counterintuitive. In fact, it's a wonderful learning environment for kids.

BY REBECCA SIMPSON

Anyone who is truly connected to Hong Kong knows that our city is one of contrasts. The fragrant harbour's high-density living quite rapidly surrenders to breathtaking natural experiences.

For pupils receiving a world-leading education at Malvern College Pre-School or Malvern College Hong Kong, this contrast is presented in bi-weekly excursions, as part of its pioneering Forest-Beach School programmes.

"We're very fortunate to have offered Forest-Beach School for four years now, with huge success," says JACQUELINE MCNALT, the Founding Principal of Malvern College Pre-School Hong Kong. "We find this is a unique opportunity for all our Malvern pupils to connect to the greater outdoors and learn about nature, sustainability and life cycles, and understand those deeper scientific concepts to an even greater level."

Young Malvernians are transported from their modern campuses at Sai Ying Pun, Kowloon and Tai Po to learn with their toes in the sand at one of two Forest-Beach School learning sites. These natural bi-weekly adventures run in all safe weather conditions.



What is Forest-Beach School?

The Forest-Beach School programme is based on a philosophy of child-led learning, with a focus on all five senses. Nature, the outdoors and open spaces become the children's temporary classroom.

The basic aim is to give children the freedom to learn in an exciting environment, which they may have had little previous exposure to, particularly in a dense city landscape like Hong Kong.

Jacqueline reflects on a recent visit: "I was at our Forest-Beach School and the children were using carpentry – hammers, nails and tools – and making ziplines, pullies, using swings. They were learning about momentum and all those scientific concepts we know are so important."

The pre-school pupil experience

Adventures in forests and on beaches start early at Malvern, even for the littlest Malvernians attending Malvern College Pre-School Hong Kong. From the age of three, these young explorers excitedly head off every fortnight to explore their natural environment.

This experience is central to the school's DNA, from its founding in the UK in mid-1800s. "Through our 156-year history of excellence, we've always been connected to outdoor education," says Jacqueline. The experience is replicated at Malvern campuses all over the globe.

During the Forest-Beach School sessions, children explore with their family members (who also get to join in the fun!) and often work in teams to complete challenges. They make mud pies and sandcastles, complete science challenges, observe beautiful insects, explore the forest and the shoreline, and generally have a ball.

Through this outdoor experience, the preschool is actively working to enhance collaboration, risk-taking, enquiry and teamwork skills – all of which identified as integral to success in the new world.

Jacqueline adds that the sessions work hard to deliver on multiple fronts. "We're learning about different aspects of the environment, while parents are also learning about the EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage) through our bilingual approach. We connect to all the areas of our curriculum."

Benefits of the beach

The positive aspects that Malvern sees kids deriving from the Forest-Beach School programme include:

- building their confidence;
- getting them moving;
- promoting creativity and imagination;
- teaching responsibility;
- boosting concentration;
- reducing stress and fatigue; and,
- creating a connection to the natural world.

The college pupil experience

All Prep 1 and Prep 2 pupils from Malvern College Hong Kong participate in bi-weekly Forest-Beach School sessions. At these sessions, young explorers work to discover their natural environment, led by a Level 3 Forest-Beach School certified leader.

"The programme is all about child-led learning," says MARIA GEBRIAL, Head of Primary at MCHK. "It provides access to the outdoors for children to play, explore and learn to manage risks. We believe that access to an outdoor environment is important to a child's wellbeing and growth – especially when it's extended beyond the classroom setting."

Bringing the indoors outdoors also means that children can learn in a way that they simply can't do indoors. Beyond the four walls of a classroom, they can make loud noises and big movements, and they can discover their own way of being sociable, whether that means playing independently, with a friend or in a group.

"The children are also involved in project-based learning through mini-projects – and they grow in confidence and self-esteem through these activities," says Maria. "They also develop skills of collaboration, self-awareness, creativity, resilience and communication, along with a positive mental attitude. Furthermore, the sessions are designed around a theme linked to units of inquiry, which means the approaches and the skills complement the PYP curriculum."



Virtual visit

Interested in finding out more? Use the QR code to watch the video of our visit to Malvern's Forest-Beach School programme. [EL](#)



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